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ABSTRACT

This document presents school principals' points of view on school and student improvement, using the real life experiences and practices of principals within Chicago's schools that have over the past few years shown the most improvement. Principals from 32 schools discussed their leadership style and strategies that contributed to school and student performance in their diverse schools. For each of 13 strategies, this document presents essential steps for implementation. The 13 strategies are: (1) create a consistent reading program; (2) set clear goals and standards; (3) coordinate curriculum; (4) build strong team faculty; (5) hold teachers accountable; (6) monitor both students and teachers; (7) foster individual teacher support; (8) encourage professional development; (9) ensure philosophical consistency; (10) invest in performance; (11) instill a love of learning through reading; (12) work together; and (13) increase time on task. The document concludes that good principal leadership is essential to positive school change. The data show that students can flourish academically regardless of their background, and that race, poverty, and other urban challenges are not reasons for failure. Students in urban schools can be very successful if the local conditions and school leadership are right. (SM)

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A Baker's Dozen Strategies to Increase Academic Achievement

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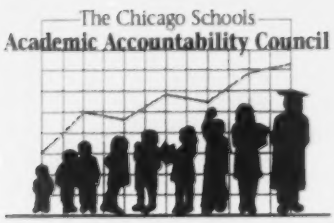
October 1999



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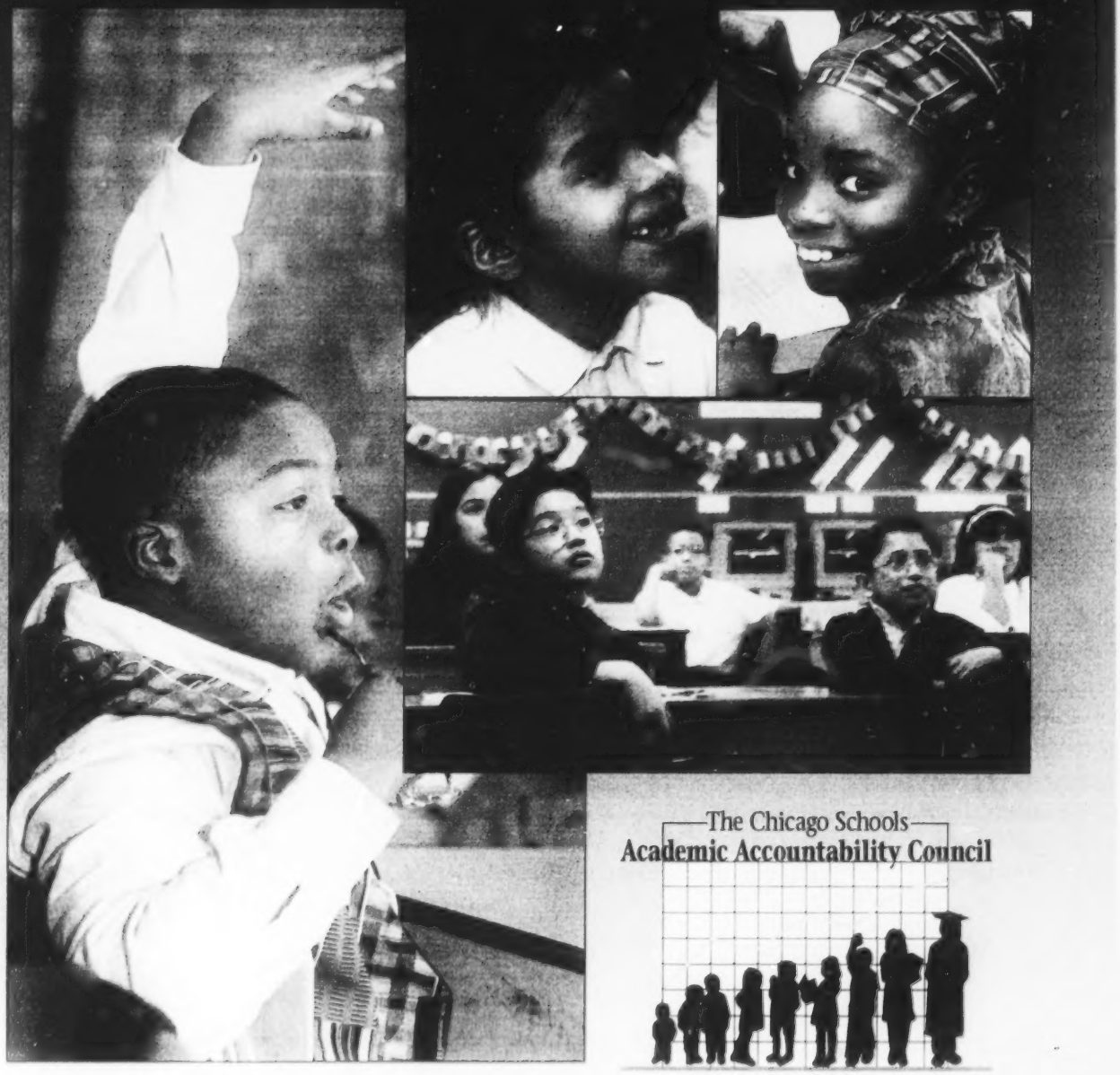
A Baker's Dozen Strategies to Increase Academic Achievement



The Chicago Schools
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A Report prepared for: the Chicago Board of Education and the Illinois State Board of Education

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BACKGROUND

The *1995 Amendatory Act to the Illinois School Code* created the Academic Accountability Council and charged it with oversight of the new accountability reforms within the Chicago Public Schools.

MISSION

The mission of the Academic Accountability Council is to ensure the continuous improvement of the public schools in Chicago.

THE CHICAGO SCHOOLS ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY COUNCIL MAY MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHICAGO BOARD OF EDUCATION:

- In support of future initiatives for school improvement.
- [At the request of the Chicago Board of Education or the Chief Executive Officer] to conduct or arrange for evaluations of educational programs, policies and procedures as may be deemed necessary to ensure academic progress of attendance centers in the system.
- [In consultation with the State Board of Education] to ensure consistency of evaluations and prevent duplicative evaluation efforts.
- To recognize exemplary achievement in the Chicago Public Schools.
- To initiate recommendations for remediation, probation, intervention, reconstitution, or closure of a CPS attendance center for not meeting academic standards.

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October 15, 1999

Dear Friends:

It has been four years since the Chicago Reform Board of Education was given the opportunity to reshape the Chicago Public Schools. Since that time there have been many innovations and changes. New buildings have been built. New tests have been administered. New structures of education—the small school and the charter school have been created. New theories and accountability measures have been tried.

Each element of change has undergone continuous analysis as we learn what works and what does not; which theories have validity, which are less than useful. Ultimately our test is school and child improvement. When all is said and done, do our students learn better, perform better; are they better prepared for their next steps in life? And, to ensure best practices, the Reform Board and the Administration have presented many documents chronicling these varied experiences.

The document before you is drawn from and presents a different point of view on school and student improvement. The "Baker's Dozen Strategies for School Improvement" draws not on this theory or that. Rather, it draws upon the real life experiences and practices of the principals in the Chicago schools that over the past few years have shown the most improvement. Principals from 32 schools, spanning the entire geographic reach of the city and a broad spectrum of income and ethnic differences, were asked to talk about their leadership style and what they thought were the most important strategies that contributed to school and pupil performance. Despite the diversity of the populations they served, and contrary to 'popular wisdom,' there are practices and precepts that are common to every successful school.

We believe the 13 strategies in this document are important—not only to the schools where they are now employed, but also to every school, in this and every city where people are working for change. It is our hope that the "Baker's Dozen" will be read and embraced by parents, educators and advocates alike. We hope it will be used as a tool for strategic planning; a measuring rod for performance, and most of all as an inspiration and road map for the countless people who believe—and work to see—that "No Child Is Left Behind."

Gery J. Chico
President
Chicago Board of Education

Paul G. Vallas
Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Public Schools

Leon Jackson
Chairman
Academic Accountability Council

Beverly Tunney
President
Chicago Principals and Administrators Association

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To the men and women in the principals office, quietly working to improve the lives of children.

The ability to learn and communicate something new, and of value, is never an endeavor done alone. As is the case with the schools and the children who are succeeding, the achievement of this booklet is the result of the efforts of many. In particular, thanks go to:

The members of the Chicago Schools Academic Accountability Council who, under the leadership of Leon Jackson, commissioned and sponsored this work.

Gery J. Chico, President of the Chicago Board of Education and Paul G. Vallas, Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools. Their encouragement and cooperation gave us access to needed data and personnel. Their dissemination of this booklet, and the ideas within it, is evidence of their continuing commitment.

Beverly Tunney, President, and Al Bertani, Senior Executive Director of Leadership Programs, Chicago Principals and Administrators Association, allowed us to present and refine our ideas with a group of 50 principals. Dr. Kenneth Wong, Marcus Nunes and Tom Corcoran provided valuable insight and expertise.

And the principals of the 32 schools upon whose experience these lessons were based. Each gave of their time and shared their experience and insights so that others could benefit.

Distribution of this study was made possible in part by the Chicago Annenberg Challenge.

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Leave No Child Behind:

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Karen Glinert Carlson, Ph.D

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M. Delia Ramirez

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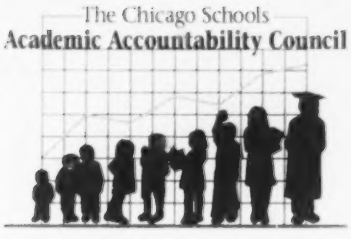

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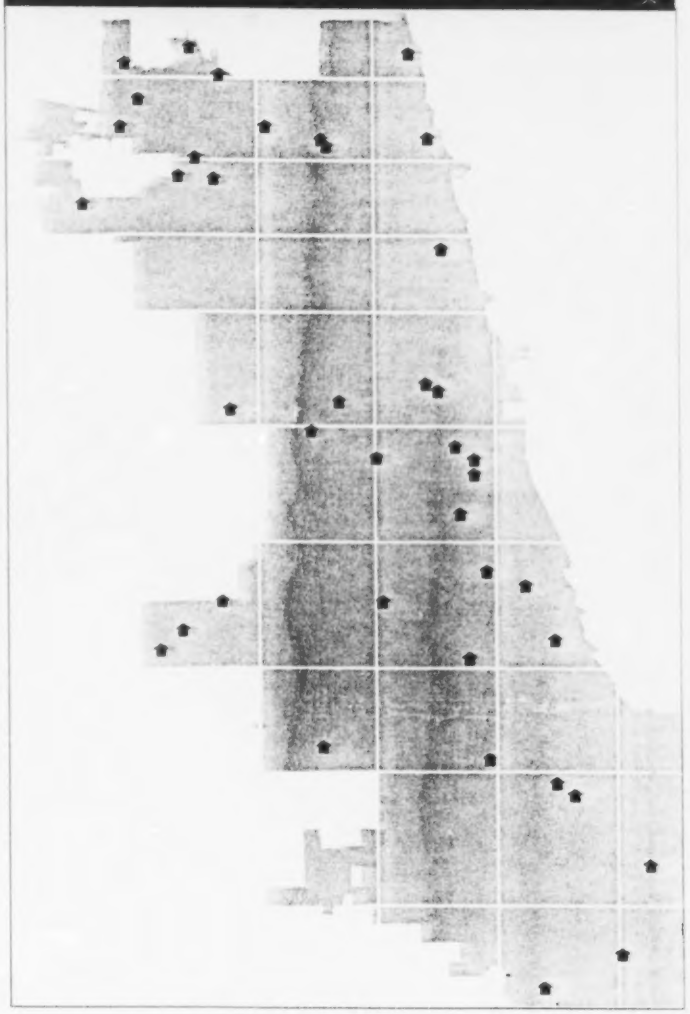
Introduction

Chicago school reform has brought about many successes. Most importantly, a number of public elementary schools have substantially increased the percentage of students reading at or above national norms. Interestingly, the same schools that demonstrated the most significant reading gains also demonstrated a significantly lower percentage of students who fail to meet promotion standards at the third and sixth grades. These schools also showed great acceleration in mathematics, highlighting the importance of reading to other academic areas including problem solving. Also interesting—and vitally important—these improving schools not only spanned the city, but also spanned racial and economic divides, once again underscoring the fact that it is possible for all our children to succeed. At a time when Chicago is attempting to reverse decades of academic decline, the Chicago Schools Academic Accountability Council thought it essential to understand the dynamics within schools that yield success, where others have failed.

Chicago's "Improving Schools" Span the City



Policy makers, the public and researchers know that principal leadership matters in improving student performance. Less clear to most of us are the specific ways in which principals can make a difference in particular subject areas. To enrich our understanding of what works,

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the Chicago Schools Academic Accountability Council conducted a two-year study of effective strategies employed by principals in over 30 elementary schools that showed dramatic improvement in reading. Although many of the schools examined still must travel a long road to reach national norms and the standard that the Chicago Board of Education has set, this study provides insight into the essential elements that must be present in the classroom and in a school if we are to reverse the years of failure and despair. A key finding of the study is that, unbeknownst to them, the principals of the succeeding schools shared a set of common strategies. These include a strong commitment to a focused balanced reading program, teacher accountability and support, intensive monitoring, creative investment in student learning and increased time on task, among others. On the other side of the equation, the Chicago Schools Academic Accountability Council simultaneously undertook a study of "twice-failed" students—students who were retained twice in the same grade—and the schools where these students were most prevalent. Not surprisingly, the study "Leave No Child Behind: Impediments to Academic Achievement" documented that schools with high numbers of "twice-failed students" were often the mirror opposite of the successful schools, lacking a coherent, balanced reading strategy and the rigorous teaching/observing/monitoring methods that characterize improving schools. Furthermore, the improving schools had significantly lower rates of student failure than other schools. It appears that it is not only our children who are failing, but also our schools which are failing them.

We hope to change that. From our research, we have gleaned the 13 most consistent, and what we believe are the most essential components of successful strategies and termed them the "Baker's Dozen." This booklet, based upon them, is meant to serve as a concise and useful document to those who would like to see our schools and our children succeed.

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1. Create a Consistent Reading Program

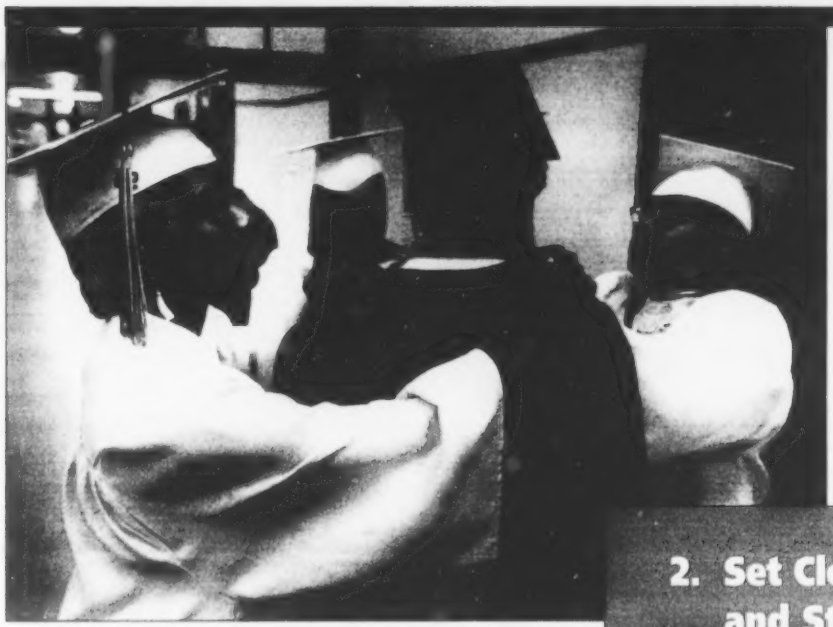
"If a primary teacher doesn't know how to teach phonics, I simply won't hire them!"

—Anthony Jelinek, Principal, Hibbard Elementary

Self-evident as it seems, the principals emphasized the importance of a consistent, coherent reading program at every grade level. Students in improving schools receive a balanced literacy program that includes a solid phonics base in the primary grades coupled with a rich literature-based methodology and a rigorous monitoring system.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Implement a coherent reading program at every level
2. Emphasize phonics and decoding in early grades
3. Read aloud to students at all levels
4. Maintain a literature-based approach, balancing fiction and non-fiction material
5. Focus on fluency and comprehension
6. Teach reading across the curriculum (e.g. how to read science)
7. Use writing for a variety of purposes across the curriculum
8. Use daily oral language exercises (DOL) to teach grammar
9. Develop vocabulary through planned experiences and projects



2. Set Clear Goals and Standards

"Most of our students come to school without necessary readiness skills. This cannot be an excuse. I make it clear that it doesn't matter where you come from, what matters is where you are going!"

—Frances M. Oden, Principal, Beethoven Elementary

Establishing clear, broadly understood performance expectations is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of a principal. Both staff and students must have clear goals in mind in order to show results. In their role as instructional leaders, successful principals create a culture of achievement by articulating measurable goals, setting high performance standards for both students and teachers and by helping teachers reach those goals. They clearly state what the students and teachers must accomplish and use results as part of their evaluation and development process.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Create a culture of achievement by setting high expectations
2. Set clear performance expectations for students
3. Set clear, broadly understood performance expectations for staff
4. Focus on results, not inputs, for evaluation and development process

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3. Coordinate Curriculum

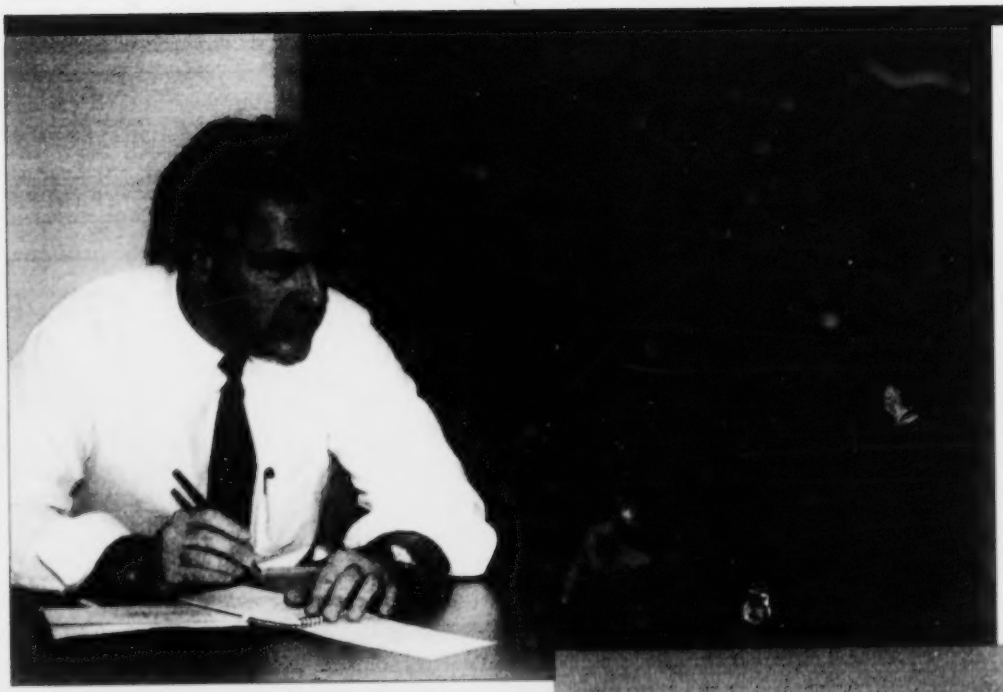
"We are consistent and organized for success. Our resource teacher and grade level teams work together to align curriculum."

—Dr. Rollie O. Jones, Principal,
Kellman Corporate Community School

Nothing frustrates students and teachers more than a curriculum with gaps, redundancies or inconsistencies between grades. A coherent, vertically and horizontally integrated curriculum, on the other hand, nurtures success. Teachers are able to confidently proceed with lesson planning, aware of what they can expect incoming students to know, and what the next year's teachers will expect from their students. Students are able to build on what they've learned before, and have a greater possibility of enjoying the satisfaction that comes with mastering material. In improving schools, principals support teacher creativity, but encourage or mandate that teachers use a common set of instructional materials, strategies and performance measures to ensure continuity.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Implement a curriculum with vertical and horizontal coherence
2. Align school curriculum to local and state standards and assessments
3. Ensure quality control
4. Facilitate inter- and intra-grade communication
5. Principals serve as a resource to staff



4. Build Strong Team Faculty

"Everyone is responsible for success; we are a team. I am here to support."

—Gandy L. Heaston, Principal, Haines Elementary

Good teaching matters! Successful principals work hard to recruit and retain superior staff. In the best schools, teachers are supportive of each other in many ways: they plan together, share ideas, resolve problems, self-evaluate and spur each other to improve. Teachers are continuous learners who study, experiment with and share effective teaching strategies and research-based methods. The principal must establish this kind of mutually supportive environment among faculty and carefully select all new staff to complement their existing team. Successful principals are equally as aggressive at counseling out staff who do not buy into the school's philosophy or meet expectations. They encourage honest reflection and dialogue.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Recruit and retain superior staff
2. Establish mutually supportive environment and team philosophy
3. Encourage joint planning and problem solving
4. Expect professionals to share ideas and resources
5. Create culture that encourages learning, thinking, reflection and self-analysis
6. Create environment that respects staff and expects all to contribute
7. Counsel out or remove staff that do not buy into the school's philosophy or meet expectations

5. Hold Teachers Accountable

"Everyone knows my expectations. I am here to support the faculty and to help them achieve their goals, not just say yes."

—Dr. William Meuer, Principal, Norwood Park Elementary

No one is more directly responsible for test scores, grades and student interests than the teacher. Successful school principals refuse to accept the vast majority of excuses given for low-performing students, and they stand firm on this issue. Principals make the case that just as they are accountable for whole school improvement, every teacher is accountable for classroom improvement. As a result, principals of "improving schools" include student performance data in their teacher evaluation and development process. They measure annual student gains on standardized tests to ensure that students gain at least a year for a year's instruction. Teachers who do not meet the goals and standards are encouraged to build their skills or consider another position. In many of these schools, principals noted that the climate of achievement present in their buildings was such that teachers often hold their peers accountable.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Make no excuses!
2. Have principals and peers hold teachers accountable for student achievement
3. Use student performance data as part of the evaluation process
4. Expect teachers to gain skills and focus instruction in areas where student performance is weak

6. Monitor Both Students and Teachers

"We provide support early on for kids having difficulty and we monitor progress carefully."

—Patrick J. Durkin, Principal, Goudy Elementary

"Improving" principals are instinctive evaluators and hands-on managers who create a culture of constant improvement. Early detection of students at risk and teachers who are not succeeding is critical to the school's success. While "improving" school principals are unified in their constant use of student-level data to monitor and provide feedback, the manner and frequency in which they do so varies greatly.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Constantly monitor and use a variety of formal and informal methods
2. Use student data for instructional decision-making
3. Meet regularly with teachers and grade level teams to review student progress and to problem solve
4. Be visible and visit classrooms regularly
5. Pace instruction carefully
6. Place high value on early detection and remediation of student learning problems
7. Implement an individualized learning plan for every student performing below grade level
8. Begin assessment and monitoring in kindergarten
9. Make sure no child falls through the cracks!

7. Foster Individual Teacher Support

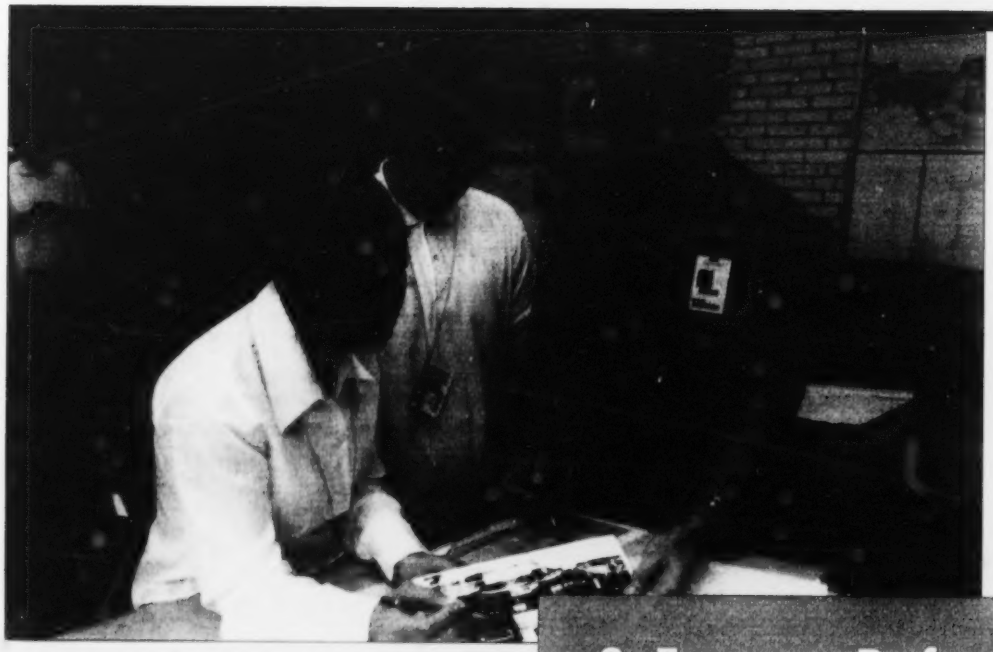
"We try to help every teacher be a good teacher; I can only tell if a teacher is good if their students are learning."

—Betty A. Green, Principal, Herzl Elementary

Teachers can't be islands unto themselves. Most "improving" schools have a point person to coordinate instruction, coach teachers and sometimes introduce teachers to new strategies and resources. Someone at the administrative level, either a principal, assistant principal, or teacher-consultant, helps teachers plan, solve problems and assess performance. In the school-based consultation model, someone takes responsibility for working with teachers on lesson planning, curriculum, ordering materials and supplies, developing assessments, problem solving and observing instruction as needed. These schools reflect a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Support teachers to ensure success
2. Designate a point person to coordinate instruction and support staff improvement
3. Use coaching and mentoring as support processes
4. Implement a mentoring/induction process for new staff



8. Encourage Professional Development

"Everyone here is a lifelong learner, and we must continue to improve what we do."

—Jeannie Gallo, Principal, Smyser Elementary

It's up to the principal to structure the schedule and budget so that teachers have the time and opportunity to update their skills. "Improving" school principals invest in professional development to get the best out of their staff. They motivate staff to reach their personal best, providing them with examples, resources, tools, time and supports. Most "improving" school principals provide frequent opportunities for high quality, school-based professional development that reaches into the knowledge base on teaching and learning and includes research-based reading and writing strategies, thinking skills, assessment and curriculum alignment with standards, analysis of student data for instructional decision-making, graphic organizers and the use of technology to support learning. Staff are expected to share what they learn and principals provide time for this exchange. These schools reflect a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement. Many of the schools use the restructured day to create time for professional development.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Give teachers time and opportunity to refine and improve skills
2. Tie professional development to school's priorities and staff needs
3. Value and use teacher expertise
4. Plan high level professional development topics: reading and writing strategies, curriculum alignment, standards and assessment, technology and data-driven decison-making
5. Set the expectation that staff share what they learn and provide sufficient time to do so

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9. Ensure Philosophical Consistency

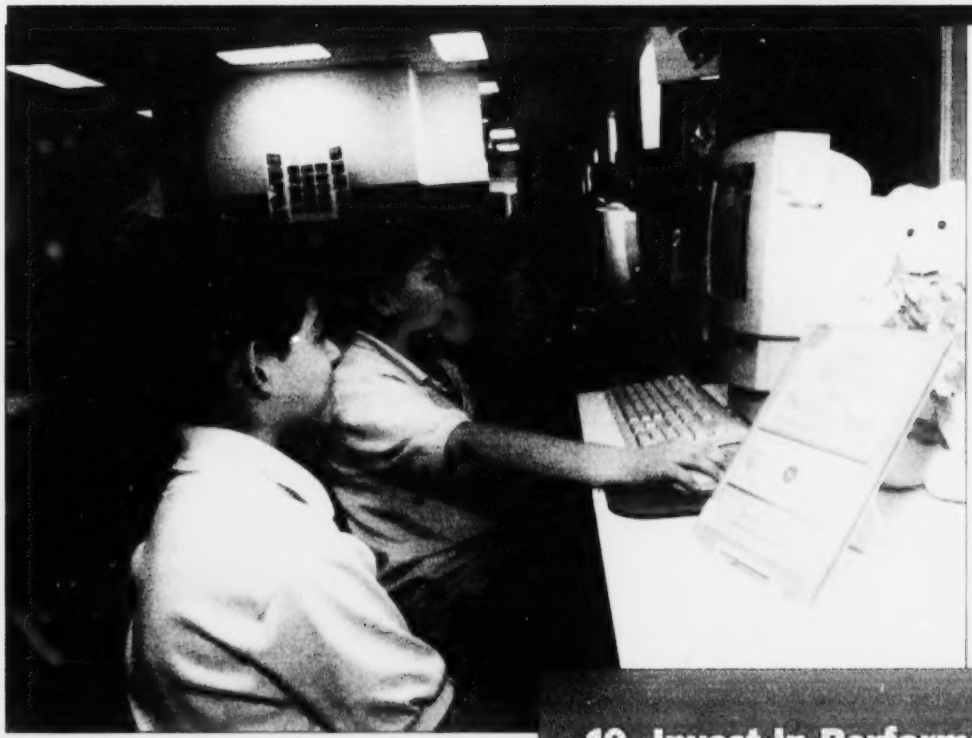
"Choose people who are flexible and share your vision, or you are buying conflict down the line."

—Alfonso R. Valtierra, Principal, Galileo Scholastic Academy

In schools that are "improving," everyone in the building and community buys into the same vision and mission. These common beliefs and values drive behavior. The principal embodies the school's vision and philosophy through his/her actions and words. Just as they take pains to ensure vertical and horizontal coherence with curriculum, principals also ensure philosophical alignment. When choosing staff, principals look beyond the resume and probe the teaching philosophy of a job candidate.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Principals exemplify the vision and philosophy of the school and "walk their talk"
2. Match staff philosophy, attitudes, knowledge and skills to school's needs
3. Work to ensure across the board "buy-in"
4. Hire staff that are a good match for the school mission, vision and philosophy
5. Counsel out or remove staff that are not a good match for the school!



10. Invest In Performance

"We are across-the-board children! We put our money where our mouth is."

—Sharon Wilcher, Principal, James Ward School

Individual schools in Chicago make decisions over considerable amounts of discretionary funding. Improving school principals dedicate discretionary dollars to investments that improve performance, such as classroom and library books, smaller class sizes, longer school days, all-day kindergarten, early childhood education, tutors, professional development and computer technology. They make conscious choices about the allocation of scarce resources to support achievement and they craft budgets to reflect priorities.

In many of these schools, principals made a commitment to extend the school day and/or school year for the entire student body and not just the students who needed extra help.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Invest resources beyond per pupil allocations to enhance student achievement
2. Monitor results carefully; fine tune budget when investments do not yield results

11. Instill a Love of Learning through Reading

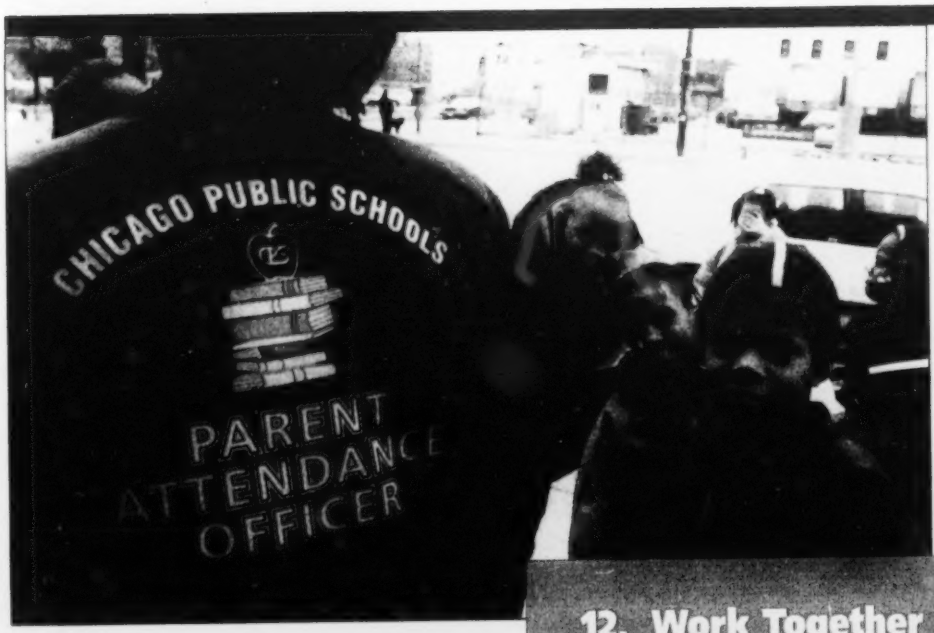
"When children love reading, they love learning."

—Dr. Ronald K. Clayton, Principal, Walsh School

Improving schools are united in their mission: to develop lifelong learners who are creative thinkers, problem solvers and literate communicators. Principals of improving schools know that if kids love learning, they will love reading and vice versa. Nothing supersedes this goal because literacy is accepted as the foundation for learning and the gateway to all other content material. School staff encourage curiosity and set up an environment that helps kids become thinkers and makes reading easy, fun and accessible. Principals extend library hours, create reading clubs and ensure quiet time for reading and learning. Students and teachers donate books in their honor on birthdays and special occasions and books are given as incentives for doing well. Read-a-thons, family reading nights and other whole school reading activities are done to encourage reading. Teachers read aloud to children at all levels and teachers are readers and learners, too. When everyone is learning, it is contagious!

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Help students learn to love reading, so they will love learning!
2. Make sure everyone in the school is a learner and a reader!
3. Value learning and make it fun!
4. Remember that when everyone is learning, it is contagious!



12. Work Together

"Everyone is responsible and accountable to each other; there is nowhere to hide."

—Elena Savoy, Principal, Wildwood School

Improving school principals do not compartmentalize tasks. They expect teachers, administrators, parents and students to work together on issues of common concern. They share decision-making and do not dictate from on high. Instead, they work to involve as many people as is reasonably possible, thus achieving widespread buy-in. These principals are adept at creating a culture of achievement in the school that engages every person from teachers and support staff to parents and students to work on the main goal of schooling. In "improving" schools, robust communication and cooperation are at work. Parent, student and school contracts are common and student work is shared weekly with parents for review and signature.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

1. Expect everyone in the school community to work together; do not compartmentalize
2. Create a culture of achievement that depends on everyone's contribution
3. Develop and implement "robust" communication strategies between and among staff, families and community

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13. Increase Time on Task

"All we do around here is read, read, read! Everything we do involves reading!"

—Mary Lee Lasher-Taylor, Principal, Albany Park Multicultural Academy

In successful schools principals recognize the need for more time to learn. They protect instructional time and are creative in their ability to increase reading time for the entire school. They also focus assistance for students who were behind. Principals use Title I funds to extend the school day and principals use retired teachers, teacher aides, other students and volunteers to tutor students who need an extra push.

ESSENTIAL STEPS:

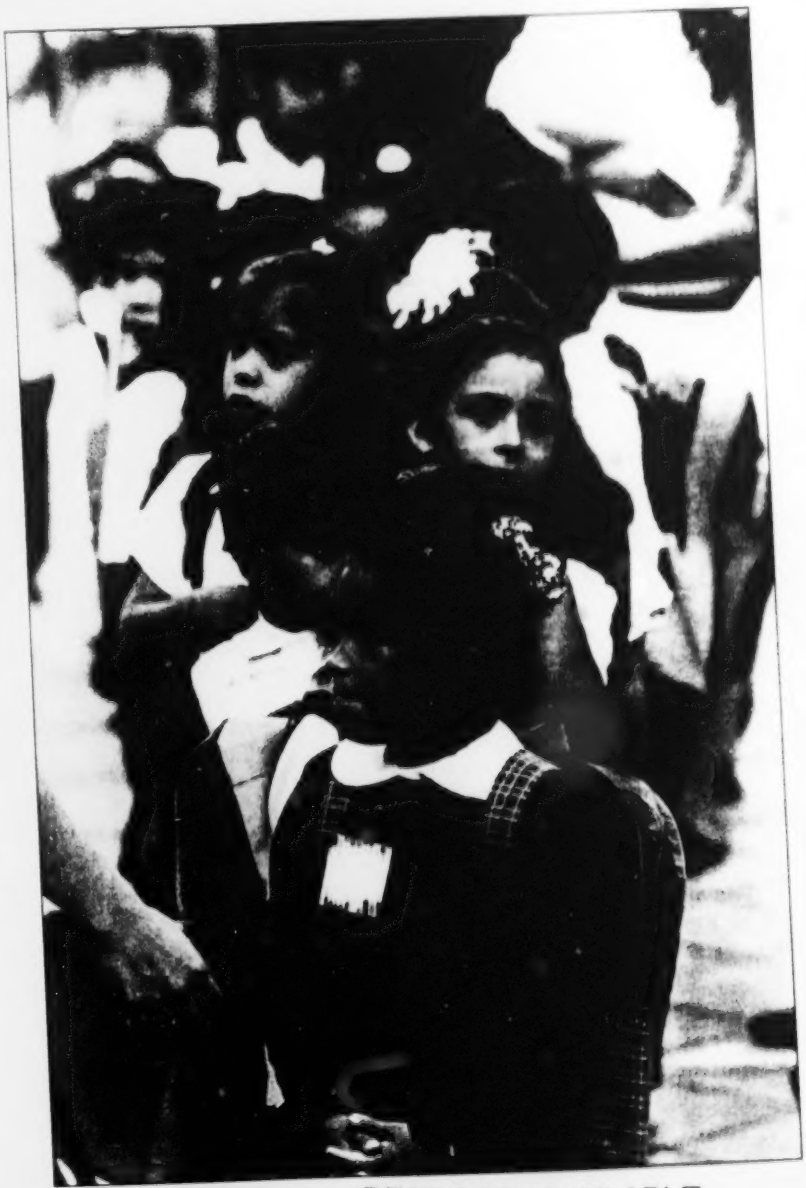
1. Increase reading time during school day and make good use of time
2. Provide smaller class size or tutors to give extra time on task during the school day
3. Provide opportunities before and after school to increase learning time
4. Increase the school day for all students using discretionary resources
5. Increase school year using discretionary resources
6. Focus, focus, focus!!!

Conclusion

While there is no magic formula for school improvement, we have long known the importance of good principal leadership to positive school change. Clearly, the observed achievement results of the schools in this study demonstrate that something special is occurring in these schools.

The data shows that students can flourish academically regardless of their background and that race, poverty and other urban challenges are not reasons for academic failure.* Schools with a large percent of students coming from low income and minority backgrounds can be very successful if the local conditions and school leadership are right.

As the Chicago Public Schools continue to set the standard for urban school reform, and the schools in our study so outperform the district as a whole, it is important that policy makers and school leaders in Chicago and across the nation study and replicate these improvement strategies. This knowledge from the field has important implications for improved principal and teacher preparation, selection and development. Most important, adoption of the Baker's Dozen can ensure that the Chicago Schools continue to improve and that no child is left behind.



*The data is reported in the complete study and is available upon request.

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A special acknowledgement to the following principals for their achievement and participation.

Dr. Mary Lee Lasher-Taylor	*Albany Park*
Dr. Ann E. Shorey	*Alcott*
Ms. Frances M. Oden	*Beethoven*
Mr. Michael Connolly	*Canty*
Mr. Thomas R. Avery	*Carnegie*
Mr. Roy J. Pletsch	*de la Cruz*
Ms. Mary M. Bloom	*Ebinger*
Ms. Diane Maciejewski	*Edgebrook*
Mr. Alfonso R. Valtierra	*Galileo*
Mr. Patrick J. Durkin	*Goudy*
Ms. Gandy L. Heaston	*Haines*
Ms. Betty A. Green	*Herzl*
Mr. Anthony L. Jelinek	*Hibbard*
Ms. Mary L. Zeltman	*Jackson, Andrew*
Dr. Rollie O. Jones	*Kellman Corporate*
Ms. Geraldine S. Banks	*Kinzie*
Ms. Gloria J. Archbold	*Leland*
Ms. Fannie L. Gibson	*Mays*
Dr. Geraldine F. Johnson	*McClellan*
Mr. Peter D. Smith	*Neil*
Dr. William G. Meuer	*Norwood Park*
Ms. Gail W. Szulc	*Oriole Park*
Mr. Brendan P. Kernaghan	*Owen*
Mr. Frank Allocco	*Palmer*
Mr. John P. Reilly	*Portage Park*
Mr. Lloyd M. Ehrenberg	*Prussing*
Mr. Sherman G. Chambers (Dr. Winifred French)*	*Reavis*
Ms. Jeannie S. Gallo	*Smyser*
Mr. Thomas J. Keating	*Twain*
Dr. Ronald K. Clayton	*Walsh*
Ms. Sharon R. Wilcher	*Ward, James*
Ms. Elena Savoy	*Wildwood*

The following principals did not participate but are also being acknowledged for their school's achievements.

Ms. Linda D. Randolph	*Carver*
Mr. Arthur Kubic	*Dore*
Ms. Patricia Walsh (Ms. Helen de Berry)*	*Earhart*
Ms. Mary N. Hudson	*Grissom*
Ms. Johnetta James	*Kilmer*
Ms. Jo Easterling-Hood	*McDowell*
Dr. Patricia K. Doherty	*G. Washington*

*Principal at time of study

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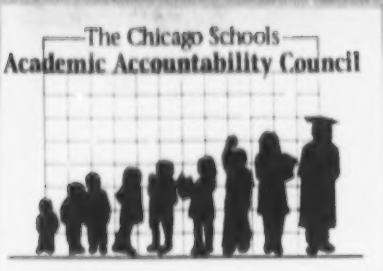

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